No. 125.

THIRTIETH HOMILY

OF THE

United Church of England and Ireland:

AN

HOMILY

OF

THE STATE OF MATRIMONY.

THE word of Almighty God doth testify and declare whence the original beginning of matrimony cometh, and why it was ordained.

It is instituted of God, to the intent that man and woman should live lawfully in a perpetual friendship, to bring forth fruit, and to avoid fornication. By which mean a good conscience might be preserved on both parties, in bridling the corrupt inclinations of the flesh within the limits of honesty: for God hath straitly forbidden all whoredom and uncleanness, and hath from time to time taken grievous punishment of this inordinate lust, as all stories and ages have declared.

Furthermore, it was also ordained, that the church of God and his kingdom might by this kind of life be conserved and enlarged; not only in that God giveth children by his blessing, but also in that they be brought up by the parents godly, in the knowledge of God's word; that thus the knowledge of God and true religion might be delivered by succession from one to another, that finally many might enjoy that everlasting immortality.

Wherefore, forasmuch as matrimony serveth us, as well to avoid sin and offence, as to increase the kingdom of God; you, as all other which enter that state, must acknowledge this benefit of God, with pure and thankful minds, for that he hath so ruled your hearts, that ye follow not the example of the wicked world, who set their delight in filthiness of sin, but both of you stand in the fear of God, and abhor all filthiness. For that is surely the singular gift of God, where the common example of the world declareth how the devil hath their hearts bound and entangled in divers snares, so that they, in their wifeless state, run into open abominations without any grudge of their conscience. Which sort of men that live so desperately and filthily, what damnation tarrieth for them! St. Paul describeth it to them, saying, "Neither whoremongers, neither adulterers, shall inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. vi. 9.) This horrible judgment of God ye be escaped through his mercy, if so be that ye live inseparately, according to God's ordinance.

But yet I would not have you careless without watching. For the devil will assay to attempt all things to interrrupt and hinder your hearts and godly purpose, if ye will give him any entry. For he will either labour to break this godly knot once begun betwixt you, or else at the least he will labour to incumber it with divers griefs and displeasures. And this is his principal craft, to work dissension of hearts of the one from the other; that whereas now there are pleasant and sweet love betwixt you, he will in the stead thereof

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bring in most bitter and unpleasant discord. And surely that same adversary of ours doth, as it were from above, assault man's nature and condition. For this folly is ever from our tender age grown up with us, to have a desire to rule, to think highly of ourselves, so that none thinketh it meet to give place to another. That wicked vice of stubborn will and self-love is more meet to break and to dissever the love of heart, than to preserve concord. Wherefore, married persons must apply their minds in most earnest wise to concord, and must crave continually of God the help of his Holy Spirit, so to rule their hearts and to knit their minds together, that they be not dissevered by any division or discord.

This necessity of prayer must be oft in the practice and using of married persons, that ofttimes the one should pray for the other, lest hate and debate do arise betwixt them. And because few do consider this thing, but more few do perform it—I say, to pray diligently—we see how wonderfully the devil deludeth and scorneth this state; how few matrimonies there be without chidings, brawlings, tauntings, repentings, bitter cursings, and fightings. Which things whosoever doth commit, they do not consider that it is the instigation of the ghostly enemy, who taketh great delight therein; for else they would with all earnest endeavour strive against these mischiefs, not only with prayer, but also with all possible diligence. Yea, they would not give place to the provocation of wrath; which stirreth them either to such rough and sharp words, or stripes, which is surely compassed by the devil; whose temptation, if it be followed, must needs begin and weave the web of all miseries and sorrows. For this is most certainly true, that of such beginnings must needs ensue the breach of true concord in heart; whereby all love must needs shortly be banished. Then can it not be but a miserable thing to behold, that yet they are of necessity compelled to live together which yet cannot be in quiet together. And this is most

customably every where to be seen. But what is the cause thereof? Forsooth, because they will not consider the crafty trains of the devil, and therefore give not themselves to pray to God, that he would vouchsafe to repress his power. Moreover, they do not consider how they promote the purpose of the devil, in that they follow the wrath of their hearts, while they threat one another, while they in their folly turn all upside down, while they will never give over their right, as they esteem it; yea, while many times they will not give over the wrong part indeed. Learn thou, therefore, if thou desirest to be void of all these miseries, if thou desirest to live peaceably and comfortably in wedlock, how to make thy earnest prayer to God, that he would govern both your hearts by his Holy Spirit, to restrain the devil's power; whereby your concord may remain perpetually.

But to this prayer must be joined a singular diligence; whereof St. Peter giveth this precept, saying, "You husbands, deal with your wives according to knowledge; giving honour to the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as unto them that are heirs also of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered."

This precept doth particularly pertain to the husband: for he ought to be the leader and author of love, in cherishing and increasing concord; which then shall take place, if he will use moderation, and not tyranny, and if he yield something to the woman. For the woman is a weak creature, not endued with like strength and constancy of mind; therefore they be the sooner disquieted, and they be the more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind, more than men be; and lighter they be, and more vain in their fantasies and opinions. These things must be considered of the man, that he be not too stiff, so that he ought to wink at some things, and must gently expound all things, and to forbear.

Howbeit, the common sort of men do judge that such moderation should not become a man; for they

say, that it is a token of womanish cowardness; and therefore they think that it is a man's part to fume in anger, to fight with fist and staff.

Howbeit, howsoever they imagine, undoubtedly St. Peter doth better judge what should be seeming to a man, and what he should most reasonably perform. For he saith reasoning should be used, and not fighting. Yea, he saith more, that the woman ought to have a certain honour attributed to her; that is to say, she must be spared and borne with, the rather for that she is the weaker vessel, of a frail heart, inconstant, and with a word soon stirred to wrath. And therefore, considering these her frailties, she is to be the rather spared. By this means thou shalt not only nourish concord, but shalt have her heart in thy power and will. For honest natures will sooner be retained to do their duties, rather by gentle words than by stripes. But he which will do all things with extremity and severity, and doth use always rigour in words and stripes, what will that avail in the conclusion? Verily nothing, but that he thereby setteth forward the devil's work; he banisheth away concord, charity, and sweet amity, and bringeth in dissension, hatred, and irksomeness; the greatest griefs that can be in the mutual love and fellowship of man's life.

Beyond all this, it bringeth another evil therewith: for it is the destruction and interruption of prayer; for in the time that the mind is occupied with dissension and discord, there can be no true prayer used. For the Lord's Prayer hath not only a respect to particular persons, but to the whole universal; in the which we openly pronounce, that we will forgive them which have offended against us, even as we ask forgiveness of our sins of God. Which thing how can it be done rightly, when their hearts be at dissension? How can they pray each for other, when they be at hate betwixt themselves? Now, if the aid of prayer be taken away, by what means can they sustain themselves in any comfort? For they cannot otherwise either resist the devil,

or yet have their hearts staid in stable comfort in all perils and necessities, but by prayer.

Thus all discommodities, as well worldly as ghostly, follow this froward testiness, and cumbrous fierceness in manners, which be more meet for brute beasts than for reasonable creatures. St. Peter doth not allow these things; but the devil desireth them gladly. Wherefore take the more heed. And yet a man may be a man, although he doth not use such extremity; yea, although he should dissemble some things in his wife's manners. And this is the part of a Christian man; which both pleaseth God, and serveth also in good use to the comfort of their marriage state.

Now as concerning the wife's duty. What shall become her? shall she abuse the gentleness and humanity of her husband, and at her pleasure turn all things upside down? No, surely; for that is far repugnant against God's commandment; for thus doth St. Peter preach to them, "Ye wives, be ye in subjection to obey your own husbands." (1 Pet. iii. 1.) To obey is another thing than to control or command, which yet they may do to their children, and to their family; but as for their husbands, them must they obey, and cease from commanding, and perform subjection. For this surely doth nourish concord very much, when the wife is ready at hand at her husband's commandment, when she will apply herself to his will, when she endeavoureth herself to seek his contentation, and to do him pleasure, when she will eschew all things that might offend him; for thus will most truly be verified the saying of the Poet, A good wife by obeying her husband shall bear the rule; so that he shall have a delight and a gladness the sooner at all times to return home to her. But, on the contrary part, when the wives be stubborn, froward, and malapert, their husbands are compelled thereby to abhor and flee from their own houses, even as they should have battle with their enemies.

Howbeit, it can scarcely be, but that some offences

shall sometime chance betwixt them; for no man doth live without fault: specially, for that the woman is the more frail party.

Therefore, let them beware that they stand not in their faults and wilfulness; but rather let them acknowledge their follies, and say, My husband, so it is, that by my anger I was compelled to do this or that: forgive it me, and hereafter I will take better heed. Thus ought the woman more readily to do, the more they be ready to offend. And they shall not do this only to avoid strife and debate; but rather in the respect of the commandment of God, as St. Paul expresseth it in this form of words: "Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord: for the husband is the head of the woman, as Christ is the head of the Church." (Ephes. v. 22.) Here you understand, that God hath commanded that ye should acknowledge the authority of the husband, and refer to him the honour of obedience. And St. Peter saith in that place before rehearsed, that holy matrons did in former times deck themselves, not with gold and silver, but in putting their whole hope in God, and in obeying their husbands; as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose daughters ye be, saith he, if ye follow her example. (1 Pet. iii. 1—6.) This sentence is very meet for women to print in their remembrance.

Truth it is, that they must specially feel the grief and pains of their matrimony; in that they relinquish the liberty of their own rule, in the pain of their travailing, in the bringing up of their children. In which offices they be in great perils, and be grieved with great afflictions, which they might be without, if they lived out of matrimony.

But St. Peter saith, that this is the chief ornament of holy matrons, in that they set their hope and trust in God: that is to say, in that they refused not from marriage for the business thereof, for the griefs and perils thereof; but committed all such adventures to God, in most sure trust of help, after that they have

called upon his aid. O woman, do thou the like, and so shalt thou be most excellently beautified before God and all his Angels and Saints; and thou needest not to seek further for doing any better works. For, obey thy husband, take regard of his requests, and give heed unto him, to perceive what he requireth of thee; and so shalt thou honour God, and live peaceably n thy house. And beyond all this, God shall follow thee with his benediction; that all things shall well prosper, both to thee and to thy husband; as the Psalmist saith, Blessed is the man which feareth God, and walketh in his ways; thou shalt have the fruit of thine own hands; happy shalt thou be, and well shall it go with thee. Thy wife shall be as a vine, plentifully spreading about thy house. Thy children shall be as the young springs of the olives about thy table. Lo, thus shall that man be blessed, saith David, that feareth the Lord. This let the wife have ever in mind; the rather admonished thereto by the apparel of her head, whereby is signified, that she is under covert or obedience of her husband. And, as that apparel is of nature so appointed, to declare her subjection; so biddeth St. Paul, that all other of her raiment should express both shamefacedness and sobriety.

For, if it be not lawful for the woman to have her head bare, but to bear thereon the sign of her power, wheresoever she goeth; more is it required that she declare the thing that is meant thereby. And, therefore, those ancient women of the old world called their husbands lords, and showed them reverence in obeying them.

But peradventure she will say, that those men loved their wives indeed.

I know that well enough, and bear it well in mind. But when I do admonish you of your duties, then call not to consideration what their duties be. For, when we ourselves do teach our children to obey us as their parents; or when we reform our servants, and tell

them that they should obey their masters, not only at the eye, but as to the Lord: if they should tell us again our duties, we should not think it well done. For, when we be admonished of our duties and faults, we ought not then to seek what other men's duties be. For, though a man had a companion in his fault, yet should not he thereby be without his fault. But this must be only looked on, by what means thou mayest make thyself without blame. For Adam did lay the blame upon the woman, and she turned it unto the serpent: but yet neither of them was thus excused. And therefore bring not such excuses to me at this time, but apply all thy diligence to hear thine obedience to thine husband. For, when I take in hand to admonish thy husband to love thee, and to cherish thee; yet will I not cease to set out the law that is appointed for the woman, as well as I would require of the man what is written for his law.

Go thou, therefore, about such things as becometh thee only, and show thyself tractable to thy husband. Or rather, if thou wilt obey thy husband for God's precept, then allege such things as be in his duty to do; but perform thou diligently those things which the Law-maker hath charged thee to do: for thus it is most reasonable to obey God, if thou wilt not suffer thyself to transgress his law. He that loveth his friend seemeth to do no great thing; but he that honoureth him that is hurtful and hateful to him, this man is worthy most commendation: even so think thou: if thou canst suffer an extreme husband, thou shalt have a great reward therefore; but, if thou lovest him only because he is gentle and courteous, what reward will God give thee therefore? Yet I speak not these things, that I would wish the husbands to be sharp towards their wives: but I exhort the women, that they would patiently bear the sharpness of their husbands. For when either parties do their best to perform their duties the one to the other, then followeth thereon great profit to their neighbours for

their example's sake. For, when the woman is ready to suffer a sharp husband, and the man will not extremely entreat his stubborn and troublesome wife, then be all things in quiet, as in a most sure haven.

Even thus was it done in old time, that every one did their own duty and office, and was not busy to require the duty of their neighbours.

Consider, I pray thee, that Abraham took to him his brother's son: his wife did not blame him therefore. He commanded him to go with him a long journey: she did not gainsay it, but obeyed his precept. Again, after all those great miseries, labours, and pains, of that journey, when Abraham was made as lord over all, yet did he give place to Lot of his superiority: which matter Sarah took so little to grief, that she never once suffered her tongue to speak such words as the common manner of women is wont to do in these days, when they see their husbands in such rooms, to be made underlings, and to be put under their youngers; then they upbraid them with cumbrous talk, and call them fools, dastards, and cowards for so doing. But Sarah was so far from speaking any such thing, that it came never into her mind and thought so to say, but allowed the wisdom and will of her husband. Yea, besides all this, after the said Lot had thus his will, and left to his uncle the less portion of land, he chanced to fall into extreme peril: which chance when it came to the knowledge of this said Patriarch, he incontinently* put all his men in harness, and prepared himself with all his family and friends, against the host of the Persians. In which case, Sarah did not counsel him to the contrary, nor did say, as then might have been said, My husband, whither goest thou so unadvisedly? Why runnest thou thus on head? Why dost thou offer thyself to so great perils, and art thus ready to jeopard thine own life, and to peril the lives of all thine, for such a man as hath done thee such wrong? At the least way, if thou regardest not thyself, yet have compassion on me, which

* Immediately.

for thy love have forsaken my kindred and my country, and have the want both of my friends and kinsfolk, and am thus come into so far countries with thee; have pity on me, and make me not here a widow, to cast me into such cares and troubles. Thus might she have said: but Sarah neither said nor thought such words, but she kept herself in silence in all things. Furthermore, all that time when she was barren, and took no pains as other women did, by bringing forth fruit in his house, what did he? He complained not to his wife, but to Almighty God. And consider how either of them did their duties as became them: for neither did he despise Sarah because she was barren, nor never did cast it in her teeth. Consider again how Abraham expelled the handmaid out of the house, when she required it: so that by this I may truly prove, that the one was pleased and contented with the other in all things. But yet set not your eyes only on this matter; but look further what was done before this that Hagar used her mistress despitefully, and that Abraham himself was somewhat provoked against her: which must needs be an intolerable and a painful matter, to a free-hearted woman and a chaste.

Let not, therefore, the woman be too busy to call for the duty of her husband, where she should be ready to perform her own; for that is not worthy any great commendation. And even so again, let not the man only consider what belongeth to the woman, and to stand too earnestly gazing thereon; for that is not his part or duty. But, as I have said, let either party be ready and willing to perform that which belongeth especially to themselves. For, if we be bound to hold out our left cheek to strangers, which will smite us on the right cheek: how much more ought we to suffer an extreme and unkind husband!

But yet I mean not that a man should beat his wife; God forbid that; for that is the greatest shame that can be, not so much to her that is beaten, as to him that doth the deed. But, if by such fortune thou chancest upon such an husband, take it not too heavily; but suppose thou that thereby is laid up no small reward here-

after, and in this lifetime no small commendation to thee, if thou canst be quiet. But yet to you that be men, thus I speak; let there be none so grievous fault to compel you to beat your wives. But what say I? your wives! No, it is not to be borne with, that an honest man should lay hands on his maid-servant to beat her. Wherefore, if it be a great shame for a man to beat his bond-servant, much more rebuke it is to lay violent hands upon his free woman.

And this thing may be well understood by the laws which the Paynims have made, which do discharge her any longer to dwell with such a husband—as unworthy to have any further company with her—that doth smite her. For it is an extreme point, thus so vilely to entreat her like a slave that is fellow to thee of thy life, and so joined unto thee beforetime in the necessary matters of thy living. And therefore a man may well liken such a man—if he may be called a man, rather than a wild beast—to a killer of his father or his mother. And whereas we be commanded to forsake our father and mother for our wives' sake, and yet thereby do work them none injury, but do fulfil the law of God; how can it not appear, then, to be a point of extreme madness, to entreat her despitefully, for whose sake God hath commanded thee to leave parents? Yea, who can suffer such despite? Who can worthily express the inconvenience that is, to see what weepings and wailings be made in the open streets, when neighbours run together to the house of so unruly a husband, as to a Bedlam-man, who goeth about to overturn all that he hath at home? Who would not think that it were better for such a man to wish the ground to open and swallow him in, than once ever after to be seen in the market?

But peradventure thou wilt object, that the woman provoketh thee to this point.

But consider thou again, that the woman is a frail vessel; and thou art therefore made the rule and head over her, to bear the weakness of her in this her subjection. And, therefore, study thou to declare the

honest commendation of thine authority; which thou canst no way better do, than to forbear to urge her in her weakness and subjection. For, even as the King appeareth so much the more noble the more excellent and noble he maketh his Officers and Lieutenants; whom if he should dishonour, and despise the authority of their dignity, he should deprive himself of a great part of his own honour: even so, if thou dost despise her that is set in the next room beside thee, thou dost much derogate and decay the excellency and virtue of thine own authority. Recount all these things in thy mind, and be gentle and quiet. Understand that God hath given thee children with her, and art made a father, and by such reason appease thyself.

Dost thou not see the husbandmen, what diligence they use to till that ground which once they have taken to farm, though it be never so full of faults? As for an example, though it be dry, though it bringeth forth weeds, though the soil cannot bear too much wet; yet he tilleth it, and so winneth fruit thereof; even in like manner, if thou wouldest use like diligence to instruct and order the mind of thy spouse, if thou wouldest diligently apply thyself to weed out by little and little the noisome weeds of uncomely manners out of her mind, with wholesome precepts, it could not be, but in time thou shouldest feel the pleasant fruit thereof to both your comforts.

Therefore, that this thing chance not so, perform this thing that I do here counsel thee: whensoever any displeasant matter riseth at home, if thy wife hath done aught amiss, comfort her, and increase not the heaviness. For, though thou shouldest be grieved with never so many things, yet shalt thou find nothing more grievous than to want the benevolence of thy wife at home. What offence soever thou canst name, yet shalt thou find none more intolerable than to be at debate with thy wife. And for this cause, most of all, oughtest thou to have this love in reverence. And if reason moveth thee to bear any burden at any other

men's hands, much more at thy wife's. For, if she be poor, upbraid her not; if she be simple, taunt her not, but be the more courteous: for she is thy body, and made one flesh with thee.

But thou peradventure wilt say, that she is a wrathful woman, a drunkard, and beastly, without wit and reason. For this cause bewail her the more. Chafe not in anger, but pray unto Almighty God. Let her be admonished and helped with good counsel; and do thou thy best endeavour, that she may be delivered of all these affections. But if thou shouldest beat her, thou shalt increase her evil affections: for frowardness and sharpness is not amended with frowardness, but with softness and gentleness. Furthermore, consider what reward thou shalt have at God's hand: for where thou mighest beat her, and yet, for the respect of the fear of God, thou wilt abstain and bear patiently her great offences, the rather in respect of that law, which forbiddeth that a man should cast out his wife, what fault soever she be cumbered with, thou shalt have a very great reward; and before the receipt of that reward, thou shalt feel many commodities. For by this means she shall be made the more obedient; and thou for her sake shalt be made more meek.

It is written in a story of a certain strange Philosopher, which had a cursed wife, a froward, and a drunkard; when he was asked for what consideration he did so bear her evil manners, he made answer: By this means, said he, I have at home a schoolmaster, and an example how I should behave myself abroad: for I shall, saith he, be the more quiet with others, being thus daily exercised and taught in the forbearing of her. Surely it is a shame that Paynims should be wiser than we; we, I say, that be commanded to resemble Angels, or rather God himself, through meekness. And for the love of virtue, this said Philosopher Socrates would not expel his wife out of his house. Yea, some say that he did therefore marry his wife, to learn this virtue by that occasion.

Wherefore, seeing many men be far behind the wisdom of this man, my counsel is, that, first and before all things, a man do his best endeavour to get him a good wife, endued with all honesty and virtue: but, if it so chance that he is deceived, that he hath chosen such a wife as is neither good nor tolerable; then let the husband follow this Philosopher, and let him instruct his wife in every condition, and never lay these matters to sight. For the merchantman, except he first be at composition with his factor to use his interfairs quietly, he will neither stir his ship to sail, nor yet will lay hands upon his merchandise: even so, let us do all things, that we may have the fellowship of our wives, which is the factor of all our doings at home, in great quiet and rest. And by these means all things shall prosper quietly, and so shall we pass through the dangers of the troublous sea of this world. For this state of life will be more honourable and comfortable than our houses, than servants, than money, than lands and possessions, than all things that can be told. As all these, with sedition and discord, can never work us any comfort; so shall all things turn to our commodity and pleasure, if we draw this yoke in one concord of heart and mind.

Whereupon, do your best endeavour, that after this sort ye use your matrimony; and so shall ye be armed on every side. Ye have escaped the snares of the devil, and the unlawful lusts of the flesh; ye have the quietness of conscience by this institution of matrimony ordained by God; therefore use oft prayer to him, that he would be present by you, that he would continue concord and charity betwixt you. Do the best ye can of your parts, to custom yourself to softness and meekness, and bear well in worth such oversights as chance: and thus shall your conversation be most pleasant and comfortable. And although—which can no otherwise be—some adversities shall follow, and otherwhiles now one discommodity, now another, shall appear; yet in this common trouble and adversity, lift up both your hands unto heaven; call upon the help and assistance

of God, the author of your marriage; and surely the promise of relief is at hand. For Christ affirmeth in his Gospel, Where two or three be gathered together in my name, and be agreed, what matter soever they pray for, it shall be granted them of my Heavenly Father. Why, therefore, shouldest thou be afraid of the danger, where thou hast so ready a promise, and so nigh an help? Furthermore, you must understand how necessary it is for Christian folk to bear Christ's cross: for else we shall never feel how comfortable God's help is unto us. Therefore give thanks to God for his great benefit, in that ye have taken upon you this state of wedlock: and pray you instantly that Almighty God may luckily defend and maintain you therein, that neither ye be overcome with any temptations, nor with any adversity. But before all things, take good heed that ye give no occasion to the devil to let and hinder your prayers by discord and dissension; for there is no stronger defence and stay in all our life, than is prayer: in the which we may call for the help of God, and obtain it; whereby we may win his blessing, his grace, his defence, and protection; so to continue therein to a better life to come: which grant us, He that died for us all; to whom be all the honour and praise for ever and ever. *Amen.*

[Price 5*s.* 4*d.* per 100. Considerable allowance will be made to Tract Societies, Sunday-Schools, and Booksellers.]

LONDON: Printed by MILLS, JOWETT, and MILLS, (late BENSLEY,) Bolt-court, Fleet-street, for J. KERSHAW, 14, City-road, and 66, Paternoster-row.